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C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 001532

SIPDIS

AF FOR DAS T. WOODS

AF/S FOR D. MOZENA, B. NEULING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/09/2015

TAGS: PREL ZI

SUBJECT: GOZ BLINKS: ISSUES AMBASSADOR WARNING

Classified By: Ambassador Dell, reasons, 1.4 b/d

¶1. (C) The Ambassador was called to the MFA the morning of November 9 for a meeting with Foreign Minister Mumbengegwi. The FM read from a diplomatic note (faxed to AF/S) and largely avoided eye contact. He accused the Ambassador of an anti-Zimbabwe bias, noting in that regard the Ambassador's confirmation hearings in the spring of 2004. Noting that the Ambassador had spoken of our desire to see, eventually, a better relationship between Harare and Washington, Mumbengegwi accused the Ambassador of misleading President Mugabe at the Ambassador's credentials ceremony last October.

¶2. (C) Mumbengegwi said the Ambassador's recent behavior had confirmed his anti-Zimbabwe bias. The Ambassador's October 12 detainment by presidential guards had been a deliberate provocation. The Ambassador's subsequent speech in Mutare November 2 and his remarks at the opening of USAID's HIV/AIDS Partnership Project on November 4 had constituted interference in Zimbabwe's internal affairs.

¶3. (C) Mumbengegwi concluded by underscoring the GOZ's concern over these actions and its determination to act should there be any future occurrence. The FM then handed the Ambassador the diplomatic note and left without allowing the Ambassador to respond. The Ambassador did manage to tell the FM that we reserved the right to respond to the note, if appropriate, following the Ambassador's consultations in Washington next week.

¶4. (C) Comment: Following days of vitriolic attacks on the Ambassador and threats to expel him, the GOZ's warning represents a significant climb down. No doubt they will endeavor to spin it otherwise to the local press and the Foreign Minister has already given a press conference and leaked the text of the GOZ's diplomatic note to the media. That said, they blinked and the Zimbabwean public will see it that way as well, regardless of the official spin.

DELL